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ABSTRACT

In recognition of the twenty-first anniversary of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), this essay reflects on the history and accomplishments of the system and considers its future as a mature component of Virginia's culture. First, the early years of the VCCS are examined, highlighting initial efforts to deal with the increasing demand for higher education; and the VCCS's rapid, but well-planned growth from its establishment in 1966 until the onset of a period of retrenchment in 1979-80, which lasted until 1986-87. Next, the paper discusses changes in Virginia's economy and society, contrasting the situation of the mid-1960s with that of the mid-1980s. The VCCS's responses to these changes are reviewed next, including: (1) the initiation of such new programs as the Career Studies Certificate programs, other vehicles for working with business and industry, and technology transfer efforts; (2) activities to keep existing programs up to date, including a comprehensive curriculum study, a semester conversion project, the development of articulation agreements with local high schools, and the creation of 2 + 2 programs; (3) the development of an adult literacy delivery system; (4) the reduction of tuition charges to help maintain access to the system; (5) the development of marketing and retention programs, including workshops focusing on community needs, access to education, student success, and other marketing/retention topics, early continuous alert systems, outreach efforts, catalog revisions, and enhanced contacts with business and industry; (6) the provision of professional development opportunities for faculty and staff (e.g., Leadership Seminars, Instructional Leadership Seminars, Chancellor's Fellowships, Development Programs for Deans and Presidents, and state board workshops); and (7) ongoing efforts to keep in touch with the Virginia General Assembly. (EJV)

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THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE COMES OF AGE

By Jeff Hockaday and Don Puyear

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The Virginia Community College system is twenty-one years old this year. Since this marks the time at which a person "comes of age" in American society, it may be an appropriate time to take a fresh look at the Virginia Community College System: to reflect briefly on its past and consider its future as a mature component of Virginia's culture.

EARLY YEARS

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, it became evident that Virginia's higher education resources were woefully inadequate for the load that was being placed upon them. A number of factors were rapidly increasing this load. The democratization of higher education, which began with the G.I. Bill at the end of World War II, had advanced to the point where higher education was widely seen as a right to be enjoyed by all who desired it and could benefit from it. In addition, the "baby boom" generation was approaching college age, and industrial development was emerging as a state priority, with its heavy requirement for a trained, skilled work force.

There was little doubt that something had to be done; there was much less agreement on the best course of action. In 1955 the Virginia Advisory Legislative Commission (VALC) published *Crisis in Higher Education in Virginia and a Solution*. That solution was to create branch campuses of existing universities. For a time it was pursued with vigor, and a number of branch campuses were established. Consistent planning for these branches did not exist, however. In Roanoke, for instance, branches of the University of Virginia and Virginia Polytechnic Institute were established across the road from each other.

The studies continued. In 1959 the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) commissioned S. V. Martorana to complete a study that set forth the needs, policies, and plans for two-year colleges in Virginia.[1] The time was not yet ripe, though, and no action was taken as an immediate result of this study. In 1963 a study commission chaired by Delegate D. French Slaughter laid a philosophical basis for community colleges, but recommended the establishment of a statewide system of technical colleges.[2] The 1964 General Assembly established a Technical College System, but it also established a Higher Education Study Commission, known as the Bird Commission.

The Bird Commission, in its report to the 1966 General Assembly, recommended a number of sweeping changes in higher education.[3] Among them was the recommendation that the Technical College System be converted to a system of comprehensive community colleges. With considerable debate, and not a little political maneuvering and compromise, this was done, and the Virginia Community College System was established in 1966. The technical colleges and most of the university branch campuses became community colleges.

The growth of the Virginia Community College System was rapid but well planned. One of the earliest actions of the State Board for Community Colleges was to commission the development of *A Proposed Master Plan for a State-Wide System of Community College Education in Virginia* (1967). This master plan envisioned twenty-two college regions encompassing the whole state; the final system evolved to include twenty-three regions. (The proposed master plan recommended one multicampus region for the two regions now served by Danville and Patrick Henry community colleges.) Other than this deviation and some minor boundary adjustments, the proposed master plan was followed closely.

Once all of the colleges were established, and soon thereafter all of the campuses had received at least their initial buildings, the focus gradually changed from building a system to managing it. For a number of years growth seemed automatic. As **Figure 1** illustrates, in only one year (1976-77) did enrollment decrease, but it then resumed its upward climb. By 1981-82, system enrollment had reached 61,428 annual full-time equivalent students (FTES).

Beginning in 1979-80, however, inflation began driving costs up, and tuition began to increase accordingly. Budgets also increased, but not rapidly enough to keep up with escalating costs. As a result, efficiency and retrenchment became the focus for many

[1] Commonwealth of Virginia, State Council of Higher Education, *Needs, Policies, and Plans for 2-Year Colleges in Virginia* (Richmond, 1959).

[2] *Vocational and Technical Education in Virginia: Present and Future Needs; Report of the Commission on Vocational Education to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia.* (Richmond, 1963).

[3] John Dale Russell, *Report of the Higher Education Study Commission* (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, State Council of Higher Education, 1965).

colleges during the years that followed. Programs and services were curtailed, in some cases severely. By 1982-83 these cutbacks, the continuing escalation of tuition, and a shrinking "college age" population began to be reflected in reduced enrollment. By 1985-86 enrollment had declined to 51,280 annual FTES. Then in 1986-87 tuition was decreased, and enrollment once again increased, to an estimated 54,771 annual FTES.

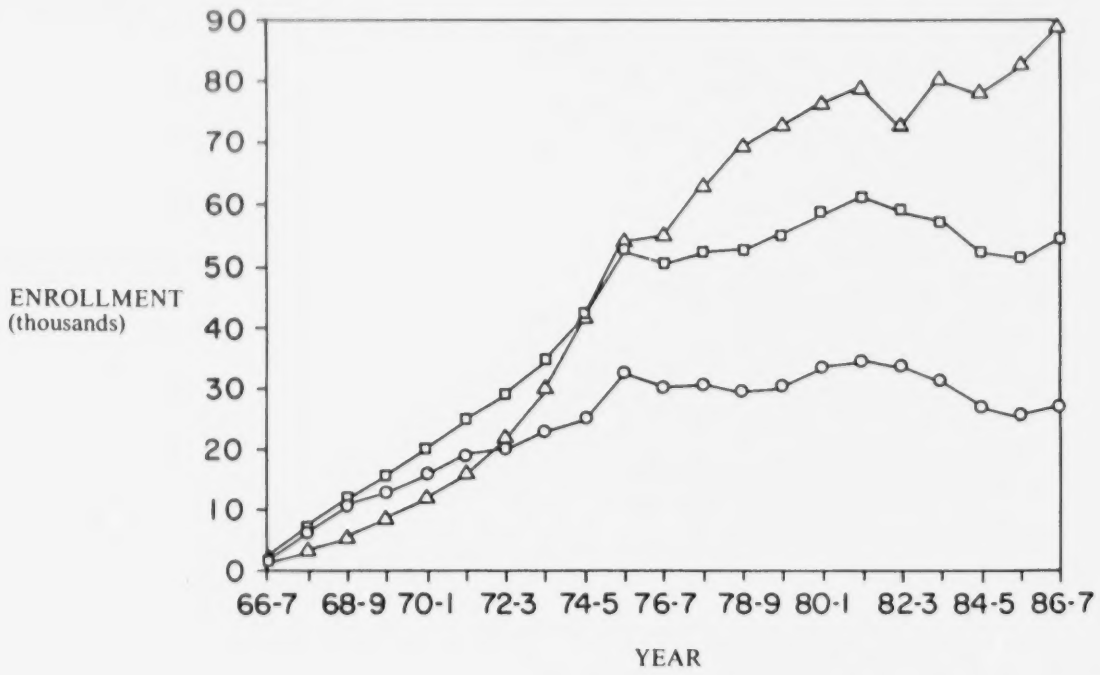
CHANGING SOCIETY, CHANGING RESPONSES

Dramatic changes have taken place in Virginia's economy and society since the mid-1960s when the community college system was being developed.

- Then the state was experiencing an imminent surge of traditional college-age youth who far outnumbered the then-existing capacity of Virginia's higher educational establishment. This called for an initial emphasis on either preparing youth for transfer to four-year colleges or preparing them for their initial employment. Now the traditional college-age population has diminished and will remain at a lower level until early in the 21st century.
- Then Virginia was shifting from an agricultural economy to one in which manufacturing industry would play a much greater role. This called for an initial emphasis on traditional manufacturing trades, engineering technology, business, and other similar programs, all focused on full-time students. Now manufacturing industries are being replaced by service and information industries, and many of the jobs in the remaining manufacturing industries are being changed by the application of high technology.
- Then many jobs required little education; the skills required did not change rapidly and could be picked up on the job. This meant that many could go to work without specialized training or without much educational underpinning. Now all but minimum-wage, dead-end jobs require the ability to acquire new skills and adapt to changing conditions continuously. Workers who entered the work force without learning skills will have to master these basic skills before they can be successfully retrained. While most of the desirable jobs require education or training beyond the high-school level, many do not require a baccalaureate degree. Most of these jobs also require continuing education to keep workers abreast of current changes in technology.
- Then there were jobs that could be done by persons who had not learned to read or compute effectively. Now adult illiteracy is recognized as a major problem facing Virginia in the immediate future.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but it does suggest the type and magnitude of change that has taken place in the past twenty-one years. While the community college mission has not changed, these societal changes require appropriate new responses to accomplish that mission. Virginia's community colleges have moved in a number of ways to meet these new challenges.

Figure 1. ENROLLMENT IN THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM, 1966-67 TO 1986-87



Key:

□ FTES (Full time equivalent students): The total number of student credit hours generated in an academic year divided by 45. This is equivalent to a full-time student taking 15 credits a quarter for 3 quarters.

○ Full-Time Students: The number of students taking 12 or more credits in the fall quarter.

△ Part-Time Students: The number of students taking fewer than 12 credits in the fall quarter.

Developing New Instructional Delivery Systems

Clearly the biggest single change in the student body of the community college has been the emergence of part-time students. As noted previously, the system initially had to focus on full-time students; as Figure 1 shows, full-time students outnumbered part-time students until 1972-73. By 1977-78, in contrast, the system had twice as many part-time students as full-time students, and since 1985-86 there have been more than three times as many part-time students as full-time students.

This shift is as it should be. The initial surge of college-age youth has passed, and societal conditions now call for a greater focus on adults: adults that need to gain new skills while they continue to work; adults that need to refine and update existing skills; and older adults that now have the time to explore learning just for the sheer joy of learning. These adults are not served well by typical two-year associate degree programs. Most cannot, or do not wish to, attend college full time. Most have more discrete goals than attaining a degree. Most do not want to commit themselves to a program that will take six or eight years to complete, as a "two-year" program can when pursued on a part-time basis.

Career Studies Certificate Programs. For the reasons discussed above, as well as the fact that it makes good sense, the VCCS developed the concept of Career Studies Certificate programs several years ago. Career Studies Certificate programs are tailored to fit needs within each community college service region. They are designed to be taken on a part-time basis, to focus on discrete objectives, and to relate to immediate needs of students. A student can often complete the requirements of one of these programs in a year or so, taking only one or two courses at a time. Very often Career Studies Certificate programs are developed in response to the needs of a particular industry, and it is not unusual for the courses to be offered at the worksite.

Other Programs with Business and Industry. Career Studies Certificate programs are only one vehicle the community colleges have for working with business and industry. Each college has someone, often the director of continuing education, specifically designated to work with the business community, to be knowledgeable about the needs of business and industry, and to keep the college well informed of the opportunities and requirements represented by those needs.

The colleges respond with specifically tailored sequences of courses, individual courses, seminars, or workshops offered either on the college campus or elsewhere in the community. The colleges also work closely with chambers of commerce and other organizations or agencies interested in the economic development of the region. The availability of specialized education and training programs at the community college can often be a deciding factor in plant location decisions.

Technology Transfer. An exciting new role for Virginia's community colleges is emerging through a new partnership between the Center for Innovative Technology (CIT) and the VCCS. Community colleges will become the liaison between business and industry, on one hand, and the whole of higher education on the other. A full-time position will be established at each college for a technology transfer agent, who will be responsible for working with local industries to identify their needs for educational and technical assistance. The

VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM: An Overview

The Virginia Community College System is a statewide institution of higher education with twenty-three comprehensive community colleges operating on thirty-three campuses. The State Board for Community Colleges, appointed by the governor with the concurrence of the General Assembly, is the governing board of the system and all of the member colleges. The chancellor is the chief executive officer of the system; the community college presidents are responsible to the state board through the chancellor. Local college boards, appointed by the local governments, are advisory, with such powers as are delegated to them by the state board.

Mission (adopted by the state board on March 20, 1986):

The Virginia Community College System functions within the educational community to assure that all individuals in the diverse regions of the Commonwealth of Virginia are given a continuing opportunity for the development and extension of their skills and knowledge through quality programs and services that are financially and geographically accessible.

The Virginia Community College System, through comprehensive community colleges, provides leadership in determining and addressing both the needs of individuals and the economic needs of the colleges' service areas.

Occupational-technical education, transfer education, developmental studies, continuing education, and community services are the primary avenues through which the mission is fulfilled. To assure that all students have the opportunity for success, each college shall provide a comprehensive program of student development services.

Educational Program Goals (adopted by the state board in November 1981 and since unchanged):

The Virginia Community College System provides financially accessible, high quality, comprehensive educational programs and services. The purpose of these programs and services is to support the economic development of the Commonwealth and to meet the educational needs of citizens of all ages.

The Educational Program Goals of the VCCS are:

1. *To offer Associate Degree Programs to prepare individuals for careers as technical and paraprofessional workers.*
2. *To offer Associate Degree Programs to prepare individuals for transfer, as upper-division students, to baccalaureate degree programs in four-year colleges.*
3. *To offer Diploma and Certificate Programs to prepare individuals for careers as technicians, skilled and semiskilled workers.*
4. *To offer Developmental Programs to prepare individuals for other instructional programs.*
5. *To offer Student Development Services which, through counseling and guidance, shall assist individuals with decisions regarding occupational, educational and personal goals.*
6. *To offer Industrial Training Programs where specific employment opportunities are available in new or expanding businesses, industries, and professions. Such programs shall be operated in cooperation with the individual community colleges.*
7. *To offer Continuing Education Programs to provide educational opportunities for individuals who wish to continue and expand their learning experiences. Such programs may include credit and non-credit courses, seminars and workshops.*
8. *To offer Community Services to provide cultural and educational opportunities which are in addition to other programs of the college.*

technology transfer agent will then act as a broker. If the community college can meet the need, it will. If the need is such that specialists at a four-year college or university are needed, the technology transfer agent will locate them and put them in contact with industry.

During the coming year pilot programs will be conducted in nine community colleges: Central Virginia Community College in Lynchburg; New River in Dublin; Northern Virginia in Annandale; Paul D. Camp in Franklin; Southwest Virginia in Richlands; Tidewater in Portsmouth; Thomas Nelson in Hampton; Virginia Western in Roanoke; and Wytheville Community College in Wytheville. If the concept proves to be viable (and we are very optimistic on this point), all community colleges should be involved within the next few years.

Keeping Programs Up to Date

In addition to creating new programs, a never-ending challenge is to keep existing programs current. The VCCS has been diligent in this endeavor in a number of ways.

Curriculum Study. In 1983 a comprehensive review of all associate degree programs was initiated with the assistance of a "Funds for Excellence" grant from the State Council of Higher Education. As a result of these reviews, ineffective or nonproductive programs have been phased out, general education requirements have been modified, and numerous programmatic enhancements have been identified.

Semester Conversion. All other public institutions of higher education in Virginia are either on, or are moving to, the semester calendar. In order to make it easier to transfer credits from community colleges to four-year colleges, and to make starting and ending dates more compatible, the Virginia Community College System has also adopted the semester calendar, effective with the 1988 summer session. Community college courses and programs are being rewritten, while keeping in mind the results of the curriculum study. This is a major project with a challenging timetable. Faculty and staff of all the colleges, as well as the resources of the system office, are working on the project, which is on schedule and doing well.

Articulation Agreements. Most of the community colleges now have formal articulation agreements with the high schools in their regions for a number of their occupational programs. Under these agreements, students who have mastered the knowledge and skill competencies of the high school program receive specific, predetermined advanced placement into the community college program without having to duplicate that instruction or take a placement examination. The State Board of Education and the State Board for Community Colleges recently passed a joint resolution calling for "the community colleges and the public schools to articulate *all* vocational-technical education programs to allow each student to continue his/her program without loss of time and resources."

2 + 2 Programs. An outstanding example of what can happen when cooperation takes place is the 2 + 2 Master Technician Program in Electronics and Electromechanical Technology, jointly sponsored by Thomas Nelson Community College and the public school districts and employers within its service region. In this program, students begin a planned curriculum in the 11th grade and pursue it through the community college. Industry's involvement in developing and implementing the program virtually guarantees desirable employment to graduates. Students were first admitted into the high-school phase of this program last fall. The community-college phase will begin next year and get into full operation the following year, when the first class graduates from high school.

Two additional 2 + 2 program projects based on the Thomas Nelson project have received Vocational Education grants. These projects are located at Central Virginia Community College in Lynchburg and Lord Fairfax Community College in Middletown. The Central Virginia project involves five local school districts, business, industry, and government; it is in design technology. The Lord Fairfax project, which involves three school divisions and an area vocational-technical center, focuses on business information specialists. Operational programs resulting from these two projects are expected in about two years.

Addressing Adult Illiteracy

A successful literacy delivery system, we believe, must have several key attributes. A successful system must:

- provide coordination among the many interested parties;
- have program accessibility in time, place, and operation;
- be designed to determine easily where to start each learner, so every learner can experience successful early growth to help overcome the years of discouraging educational experience;
- have an easily administered process for learner assessment, prescription, and evaluation—and one that is related to program goals;
- provide consistently good instruction to large numbers of widely dispersed learners in many different settings (e.g., churches, businesses, prisons) in addition to the college campus;
- offer instructional content that is interesting and meaningful to adults;
- accommodate for the shortage of professional instructors and recognize that diversely qualified citizens, businesses, and other volunteers may be the primary instructors at many learning sites;
- generate readily available information to the program personnel and the state on the effectiveness of the program; and
- do all of the above within a realistic budget.

The VCCS college presidents and the system office staff share a strong conviction that the system can be an effective vehicle for providing training in adult basic skills if a clear mandate and appropriate resources are offered. This conviction is supported by the successful experience of community colleges in other states that have been charged with the responsibility of offering adult literacy programs.

Community college personnel are accustomed to working with adults and with diverse student populations. Consequently, community college faculty and staff are already trained to work with poorly prepared adults and are both aware of and sensitive to their needs. Lastly, many believe that the adult student is most comfortable in the community college setting, where he or she is more likely to encounter other adults and where the learning environment is an important factor in attracting undereducated adult students for remediation purposes.

Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) was recently featured in a Public Broadcasting System telecast about successful adult literacy programs. The segment demonstrating the success of the MECC program at Dungannon was particularly moving. Building on the successes at MECC and other colleges in Southwest Virginia, the General Assembly recently appropriated funds for a pilot adult literacy program in Southwest Virginia. This program is expected to demonstrate the effectiveness of community colleges in addressing the problems of adult literacy training.

Maintaining Accessibility: Tuition Reduction

From the beginning of the community college movement, geographic, academic, and economic access have been key elements of the colleges' mission. The financial burden placed on Virginia's community college students has been of increasing concern to community college leaders in Virginia. Prior to 1982, changes in Virginia's tuition rate had, for the most part, tracked inflationary trends. In 1982, and thereafter, however, tuition increased much more rapidly than inflation. In 1984, in preparation for the 1985 session of the General Assembly, the state board established tuition reduction as one of its top priorities.

This legislative initiative generated some interest, but no money. Tuition increased again in 1985-86. The state board came back with the same initiative in 1986, however, and interest in tuition reduction was apparent. When newly inaugurated Governor Gerald Baliles recommended a budget amendment of $3.9 million to reduce community college

Virginia Community Colleges were established as follows:

1966-67 Northern Virginia (5 campuses): Alexandria, Annandale, Loudoun, Manassas, Woodbridge
Virginia Western: Roanoke

1967-68 Blue Ridge: Weyers Cave
Central Virginia: Lynchburg
Dabney S. Lancaster: Clifton Forge
Danville: Danville
John Tyler: Chester
Wytheville: Wytheville

1968-69 Southwest Virginia: Richlands
Thomas Nelson: Hampton
Tidewater (3 campuses): Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach

1969-70 New River: Dublin
Virginia Highlands: Abingdon

1970-71 Germanna: Locust Grove
Lord Fairfax: Middletown
Southside Virginia (2 campuses): Alberta, Keysville

1971-72 Eastern Shore: Melfa
Patrick Henry: Martinsville
Paul D. Camp: Franklin
Rappahannock (2 campuses): Glenns, Warsaw

1972-73 J. Sargent Reynolds (3 campuses): Goochland, Henrico, Richmond
Mountain Empire: Big Stone Gap
Piedmont Virginia: Charlottesville

tuition, passage was assured. As a result, tuition for the 1986-87 academic year was reduced from its previous rate of $17.75 to $17.00 per quarter credit hour. Without the special appropriation, that rate would have increased to $18.70.

This uniform statewide reduction in tuition offered a unique opportunity to determine if a small reduction would make any *real* difference in enrollment. Many persons, even among those who are strong advocates of ready economic access to community college programs, were skeptical that a reduction of only 75 cents a credit hour would make any significant difference. The Virginia Community College System, therefore, conducted a study to see what effect, if any, the tuition reduction had on enrollment during the fall quarter 1986.

This study examined the effect of the tuition reduction in three ways:

1. a written survey of a 10 percent sample (10,595 respondents) of the in-state students;
2. an examination of actual in-state enrollment for the fall quarters from 1981 to 1985, to establish enrollment trends with which to compare actual fall quarter 1986 in-state enrollments; and
3. interviews of selected students, faculty, and employers.

The data were examined both for the system as a whole and for six regions of the state in order to investigate the effect of regional and economic factors.

This study demonstrated conclusively that the tuition reduction did have a positive effect on access. In the fall quarter 1986, enrollment in Virginia community colleges increased by 7.5 percent, while community college enrollment across the nation increased by only 2.5 percent and four-year college enrollment in Virginia increased by only about 1.3 percent. After examining the results of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:[4]

1. The tuition reduction made an important contribution to the enrollment increase.
2. The tuition reduction enabled new students to attend community colleges, some of whom would have been prevented from attending by a tuition cost of $18.70 per credit.
3. The tuition reduction was especially important to persons with limited financial resources.
4. The present tuition remains an obstacle for many, barring them from access to community college programs.

Marketing and Retention Programs: Striving to Serve

For the past two years the VCCS has had a series of workshops and other activities focused on identifying community needs; increasing accessibility; removing unnecessary obstacles to student success; supplying appropriate information to present and potential students; offering enhanced student counseling and other support services; revitalizing programs; creating new programs and services; and providing other activities designed to make the college more attractive and productive. Collectively, these efforts are referred to as marketing and retention programs. These activities have included the following:

- A number of colleges have developed college-wide marketing, retention, or combined task forces. These task forces typically involve faculty, staff administrators, and students in identifying ways that the college can address the objectives outlined above.
- Several colleges have implemented an early continuous alert system initially developed at Danville Community College. These systems enable the college to alert students of potential trouble ahead, based on factors like coursework or attendance, before it is too late to take effective corrective action. Intervention strategies like this one have been effective in improving student success and retention.
- Outreach teams of faculty, staff, and students work with counselors and students of local high schools to assure that potential high school students know about the opportunities the community colleges offer. In some cases, the college also provides financial aid analysis and counseling to the local high schools.
- Many colleges have rewritten all or portions of their catalogs and other publications after analyzing them for readability and clarity.
- A few colleges have developed automated tracking and followup systems, which trigger appropriate letters at significant points in the student's college career, from first contact to graduation and beyond.
- Almost all colleges have enhanced their contacts with the local business and industry community, defining areas in which the college can address appropriate unmet needs.

A booklet describing the marketing and retention efforts in the VCCS will be published in the spring of 1987.

Providing Growth Opportunities for Faculty and Staff

Since the initial expansion of the system, the VCCS faculty and staff have been relatively stable. Many faculty and staff members have been with the system fifteen or more years, and many of these have ten or more years to go before retirement. In a very real sense, the trite phrase "The faculty we have is the faculty we will have" is appropriate to the VCCS, just as it is to much of higher education today. It is, therefore, important to the VCCS that this faculty be competent, up to date, enthusiastic, and innovative. Staff development has been a legislative priority

[4]Don Puyear, *The Effect of a Reduction in Tuition on Enrollment, Fall 1986* (Richmond: Virginia Community College System, January 1987).

of the system for the past two sessions of the General Assembly. Progress has been made; much more needs to be done. The following outlines some of the current initiatives for faculty, staff, and administrators.

Leadership Seminar. The first VCCS Leadership Seminar was held in Richmond in June 1986. This week-long seminar was conceived as a means of developing future administrative leaders for the system. Participants were selected by the college presidents; each college was allowed the same number of representatives as it has campuses. With the addition of one participant from the system office, there were thirty-four participants holding positions in teaching, academic administration, student services, development, learning resources, and research. The seminar was an outstanding experience for participants and speakers alike, and it will be repeated in the summer of 1987.

Instructional Leadership Seminar. An Instructional Leadership Seminar, similar to the Leadership Seminar but with its focus on teaching and educational leadership, will also be held in the summer of 1987.

Chancellor's Fellowships. Both the University of Virginia and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University offer a Chancellor's Fellowship to a VCCS faculty member whose graduate education has progressed to the point that a year of residence at the university would allow that person to complete most of his or her doctoral studies. The faculty member is placed on leave with partial pay by the community college and receives a joint fellowship from the university and the VCCS. Outstanding faculty members have held fellowships each year since the program began in 1985.

Virginia Community Colleges Association (VCCA). The VCCA is an independent membership organization for Virginia community colleges, faculty, staff, students, and board members. Staff development at all levels is a priority for the VCCA, with highly successful programs held at the organization's annual meetings and at special programs held regionally at the colleges.

Development Programs for Deans and Presidents. The presidents, the deans of finance, and the academic and student services deans all meet on a regular basis. Some personal development or enrichment program is incorporated into virtually all of these meetings.

State Board Workshops. Just as the faculty and staff need renewal, the state board has determined that it needs the chance to explore issues in more depth than formal business meetings allow. The state board, therefore, regularly schedules a half-day work session on the afternoon before each board meeting. Presentations by board members, staff, or college representatives, along with indepth discussion of the presentations, are regular parts of these work sessions.

Keeping in Touch with the General Assembly

Since Virginia's community colleges rely almost entirely upon state support, open communication between the system and the General Assembly is important to their vitality. To accomplish this goal, every college is invited each spring to suggest matters of statewide interest that should be addressed to either state agencies or the General Assembly. The state board, after considering the advice of both the presidents and the chancellor, establishes a short list of legislative initiatives that it considers critically important to community colleges. Usually no more than four or five items are on the list. These initiatives are communicated to the presidents and the college boards. Then in the fall, to prepare for the upcoming legislative session, each college board and president discuss these concerns with the legislators in their service region and point out how the concerns apply to the particular circumstances of the region. This is an effective strategy. The bottom-up development assures that the initiatives reflect genuine college concerns; the top-down implementation assures that community colleges have many speakers, but with one voice.

CONCLUSION

The mission of the Virginia Community College System remains much as it was in 1966, when the system was founded. The programs and activities the VCCS employs to accomplish that mission have changed considerably in the past twenty-one years—and they will continue to change as the colleges, and the system as a whole, keep striving to understand the Commonwealth's needs and to develop responsive programs and services.

Quality associate degree programs will continue to be the foundation for the other programs and services. The system will continue its efforts to keep community college programs of all types up to date; to have well-prepared, dedicated faculty; to equip the colleges with current, appropriate equipment; and to supply appropriate support services. Only through such diligence will the VCCS warrant the continued confidence of Virginia's citizens.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

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